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## A STUDY IN ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT.

I HAVE had a girl in my classes for over a year who has interested and puzzled me very much. She is about sixteen years old, very small for her age, and appears much younger than she is. She left the public schools when in the fifth grade, and then attended a large private school until last year, when she entered the school where I am teaching. I believe she is an only child, and I know that her mother is very ambitious for her.

She first came to me the second half of last year, when I had her in a grammar class and alone in German. I had been warned by one of her former teachers that she could not learn anything. I did not find her stolidly stupid, but it seemed as if her mind must have been paralyzed when she was perhaps ten years old, and she had never used it to any extent since, so incapable was she of doing any independent thinking. She worked hard, and was always attentive and eager to do well. She never volunteered an answer, but if called upon always said something immediately, but without any thought, unless the question was prefaced by the remark, "Think before you answer." In the grammar class she had a conscious way of looking around, after reciting, as though she expected to be laughed at, and would often add, scarcely stopping for breath: "O no, that isn't right!" Her habit of answering without thinking led to some curious results, as when she told me that the plural of "Mr." is "Mrs.", and when she said in sober earnest: "If the subject is that about which something is said, the predicate must be that about which nothing is said."

She could not keep up with the class, and it soon seemed best to give her individual work in grammar; so I divided a period between her grammar and her German; and it was the hardest and most discouraging work I have ever done. I might flatter myself one day that there was *one* point she surely understood, only to find the next day that the same ground must be

gone over again. She was constantly on the alert to catch some little external sign by which she might know a thing. For example, I found that she had decided that all words of two letters were prepositions and was working on that principle.

She told me that she had studied German a good many years, and gave me to understand that she was an advanced pupil in that branch. But I soon found that what she had to work with was a small vocabulary and a very well-developed ability for guessing at the relations between words. She had no idea of how to determine the tense of a verb or the case of a noun by its form, and as a result could not write the simplest sentence in German correctly. But when I tried to have her learn to decline nouns and conjugate verbs, I found that it was simply impossible for her to do so. She cannot, and I doubt if she ever will be able to learn a set of endings and remember them for more than a day. Her knowledge of the different forms of words will have to come entirely from their use in sentences.

I confess that when I learned that this pupil was to be in both my Latin and algebra classes this year, I groaned inwardly, and I still think the Latin was a mistake. It was her mother's wish that she should take it. She had been through the elementary algebra with some tears and so little success that it was a question whether she should be allowed to go on into high-school algebra. I started out with two determinations: that she should not fail in both Latin and algebra, and that, if possible, she should get over the feeling that a schoolgirl's life is a burden; for I believe she works as hard as any girl in school. I have tried to give her more confidence in herself and always to make her think before answering. She is succeeding in algebra beyond my hopes, which were not very high. She works examples fairly accurately, though very slowly (her writing and figuring look like that of a young child), but in the problems it is still only the very simplest that she can reason out herself. She constantly gives proofs that, wherever it is possible, she lets some rule or catch phrase take the place of thought. The first of the year she heard some of the girls use the phrase, "two minuses make a plus," and that immediately became her all-sufficient answer for

all questions of sign, whether in addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division.

In Latin the case is less encouraging. To learn a vocabulary or declension, as I said before, is an impossibility for her. In writing sentences she can think out the proper case or the proper number of a noun, whichever suggests itself to her first, but to think out both number and case without any suggestions seems beyond her. Her highly developed guessing powers made her work in translation, while the sentences were very simple, fairly good. But I found that she was determining the relations of the words entirely by their order in the sentence. The first word was always subject, then came its modifiers, then the object and its modifiers, and finally the verb. If the first word chanced to be in the genitive case, it made no difference to her, it answered her purpose for a subject, just as well as a nominative. And when unkind fate chanced to give her a sentence where the verb stood first, she transformed the verb without hesitation into a noun of kindred meaning, and went happily on her way. When her vocabulary fails her, her guesses are sometimes surprising, as when she translated "*puer librum habet*," "the boy is generous," on the ground, I suppose, that *librum* sounds like "liberal," and "liberal" is "generous."

Of course, I have a theory as to the cause of this mental paralysis, if I may call it that, though I may be all wrong. I know nothing of her early teaching, but before I had heard the phrase "arrested development," I had decided in my own mind that as a child this girl was probably very small and fairly bright, and appeared younger, and therefore brighter, than she really was; and that unduly ambitious parents, and perhaps ambitious teachers, had pushed her on until she got entirely beyond her depth. Being a patient, uncomplaining child, she did not make a fuss when she could not understand, but simply ceased to try, and gradually built up, as a substitute for understanding, and thought, a system of catch phrases and guesswork, until she almost lost the power of thinking. Inevitably, the result was repeated failures as she got into higher classes and a consequent loss of confidence in herself. The individual work possible in small

classes may to some extent repair the damage, but it can never do so entirely or make up for the time she has lost. I cannot but believe that she might have been a fairly good, though never a brilliant, scholar under wiser training.

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